

Healthy Lifestyles: KDHE's Workplace Employee Health and Wellness Program

By Bridgitt L. Mitchell,
Assistant to the Secretary

Health is a national priority. As a result, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (www.os.dhhs.gov) has outlined objectives for health promotion and disease prevention for the nation. These objectives are referred to as *Healthy People 2010*.

Healthy People 2010 is a comprehensive set of health objectives to be achieved over the first decade of the century. The overarching goals of these health objectives are to:

- 1) Increase the quality and years of healthy life;
- 2) To eliminate health disparities which are defined as a gap in the health status of different groups of people, in which one group is healthier than the other group or groups.

The Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov) identifies several behaviors that impact longevity:

- 1) Tobacco usage
- 2) Poor nutrition
- 3) Physical inactivity.

Further studies suggest that participation in support groups increase the chance of an individual's success with making a healthy lifestyle change. Given these facts, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) recognizes that the physical and mental well being of the workforce can be improved through workplace health promotion programs that support preventive medicine, exercise, diet, stress management, tobacco cessation, drug and alcohol avoidance, and accident prevention.

KDHE's mission is to protect and promote the public health of Kansans. This is accomplished by ensuring that the citizens of Kansas live in safe and healthy environments. Given the focus of the agency, Secretary Roderick Bremby is also committed to providing opportunities for supporting the health and wellness of its employees.

KDHE has supported an employee Health and Wellness Program for more than 20 years. The purpose of this program is to promote healthy behaviors, encourage employees to be proactive about their health, provide educational opportunities that emphasize healthy lifestyle choices, and serve as a resource for health information within the agency.



This program is guided by the recommendations from the KDHE employee wellness steering committee and KDHE employee health and wellness task force. KDHE utilizes its own health and environmental program staff's expertise, including their program educational information, and has developed a network of free community resources. The agency also offers services that are appealing to the diverse needs of its employee population.

More recently, the KDHE Office of the Secretary announced the expansion of the workplace employee Health and Wellness Program into an agency-wide comprehensive program called Healthy Lifestyles. This effort is done in conjunction with the national campaign, sponsored by the Discovery Channel (www.discovery.com/health) and endorsed by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, called the Discovery National Body Challenge.

Additionally, to further support employee health goals, a variety of communication strategies have been employed to facilitate this process that include an health and wellness intranet site, e-mail correspondence, monthly agency newsletter, and health related lunch talks. Employees are also linked to other state and local resources such as LIFELINE that is a state employee assistance and counseling program.

KDHE strives to create a culture that promotes health awareness and facilitates healthy lifestyles. It is hoped that this effort will be a model for other state agencies in their quest for optimal health.